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BY
Jas D Montague

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THE FOREST MYSTERY.

By JAS. D. MONTAGUE,

Author of "Keeping His Word," "The Prisoners of the Castle," "Before the Mast," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES OUR HERO—HE DISCOVERS A FOUL PLOT.

OUR story opens upon a scene of weird beauty and grandeur.

A narrow river flowing lazily through a densely-wooded valley, the giant trees clothed with rich foliage and the banks of the stream lined with wild flowers of variegated hues.

The setting sun sheds its golden beams through the tree tops and imparts an enchanting tint to the surface of the river, the leaves and the flowers.

Soft breezes give relief to the torpid July atmosphere, and the rippling waters, the glad songs of the birds, and the occasional crackling of a twig beneath the tread of some wild animal, are the only sounds that disturb the quiet of this wild spot in nature's grand panorama.

At the point where the river makes a broad and graceful curve.

Were we to climb one of those tall trees to the very top and turn our gaze that way we might be able to see, some few miles down the river, nestling cozily upon its sloping bank, a settlement of perhaps fifty log and sod huts.

Turning our eyes in the opposite direction, we can see, just shooting out from beyond the curve in the river, a rudely constructed boat, or skiff, in which is seated a man.

The craft floats lazily down with the current, while the occupant reclines listlessly in the stern, simply guiding it in its course by the aid of a short paddle.

If we descend and approach him, following the boat along its watery path, we may overhear the solitary boatman communing audibly with himself.

He wears the garb of a trapper, and possesses a countenance pleasing in its openness, his features being attractive and his eyes bespeaking bravery and nobility of character in their possessor.

"It's tarnal strange," he mutters, with that abandon of language peculiar to the backwoodsman, even though not 'to the manor born,' "that they should hev come here. An' to think that they don't recognize me! I must have changed consider'ble in ten years. Wall, they used ter say when I went to school that 'wonders'll never cease,' an' I b'lieve it.

"How it did make my heart thump when I saw the old 'uns, an' the little cuss that war only a baby when I left home! An' I hev bin dreamin' every day an' every night of goin' back ter 'em. an' here they comes to this wilderness.

"Wall," and this was uttered with a long-drawn sigh, "I can't make

myself known to 'em till I've found him. I've sworn it, an' I'll—Hello! what's up?"

As he uttered this exclamation in a suppressed tone he gave the boat a sudden push shoreward, and grasped a sapling, to which he secured it.

Then he stepped ashore and began to creep on all fours, moving cautiously toward a point where two men stood conversing.

They were a white man and an Indian.

"Thunder!" ejaculated the trapper, "what brings Ben Small way out here? An' he's talking with that old panther, Bear Face. There's suthin' in the wind, an' I want ter know what 'tis."

He soon succeeded in getting within hearing distance without his presence being detected.

"You can do what you please with the other women," Ben was saying, "but you mustn't let no harm come to her."

"Bear Face wants no women," said the Indian, stiffly, "but his braves can take them to their wigwams."

"I don't care what's done with them—all I want is the girl. Will you do the job?"

"Why should Bear Face trouble the pale-faces?" asked the Indian. "They have done him no harm, but have been friends with him and his people."

"If you don't attack them they will you," said Ben. "Already, under the leadership of Tiger Joe, they are getting ready to drive you from your hunting-grounds."

At the utterance of Tiger Joe's name an expression of hatred flashed over the Indian's face.

"Bear Face has vowed to hang Tiger Joe's scalp in his wigwam," he exclaimed, "and he will keep his vow."

"Secure the girl for me," said Ben, "and I'll see to it that the scout falls into your hands."

"Bear Face will do as the pale-face warrior wishes," answered the Indian.

"Good! Strike to-night. They'll not be expecting anything of the kind, and you'll have an easy job of it. But don't forget—the girl must not be harmed."

Without answering the Indian strode off through the woods, and Ben started in the opposite direction.

Whed they were both out of sight the trapper arose and returned to his boat.

"The sneaking scoundrel!" he exclaimed, as he paddled rapidly down the river. "I always suspicioned that Ben Small, but I never thought he'd set them pesky varmints onto the village. Why, we kept the lazy whelp ever since he came straggling into the settlement a

year ago, an' now he's paying us fer our kindness. I ought ter hev shot the cur where he stood. 'Twon't be healthy for the cuss after I've told the boys what he's up ter."

It was late in the evening when he arrived at the settlement, and he was surprised at its unusually deserted appearance.

Hastening toward a group who stood near one of the huts, he addressed one of them, saying:

"What's up, Justin? Whar's all the boys?"

"Gone on an errand of mercy, Joe."

"What's that?"

"Why, Ben Small came in about half an hour ago all out of breath, and said the redskins were going to attack the Bensons down the river to-night, so the boys went down to help our friends out."

"The imp o' Satan!" shouted Joe. "Justin, this is the place where the reds are goin' ter strike, not Benson's. How many men are thar here?"

"Mr. Vernon, Harry and myself are the only ones left behind. But, Joe, are you sure——"

"Certain sure! Git your women into the stockade, an' keep yer eye peeled. I'll take a horse an' bring the boys back. Thar's no time ter lose; theimps may be here any minnit."

So saying, he hastened off, and in a few moments, mounted on a fleet horse, he was speeding in the direction taken by the "boys."

CHAPTER II.

ALICE IS ABDUCTED AND HER MOTHER DISAPPEARS.

THE settlement into which the reader has just been introduced was principally the headquarters of a large band of trappers, and had been added to but recently by the arrival of two families.

These were Mr. Justin, his wife and daughter Alice, a sweet girl of perhaps seventeen years of age, and Mr. Vernon, with his wife and son Harry, whose age was scarcely twenty years.

These three were the only women in the settlement, and their presence had already given the place an air of refinement that was reflected in the improved deportment of the trappers.

The new arrivals were given a cordial welcome by the trappers, to whom Mr. Justin explained that they did not come to that wild country to settle, but each were in search of loved sons who long years before had left their eastern homes in search of adventure, and they were in hopes that chance would throw them in the way of the boys.

Both these men were very much disturbed by the information just imparted by the scout, and they lost no time in placing the women folks within the stockade, a walled inclosure containing a strongly constructed hut prepared especially for emergencies like that which now threatened them.

"I trust that Tiger Joe will succeed in overtaking the men before they get too far away," said Justin. "I am afraid, though, that the savages will be here before they can get back."

"Well, I have no doubt but that we can hold our own in the stockade until they do come," said Mr. Vernon, hopefully.

"It passes my comprehension," continued Justin, "what possessed Small to lead the boys off on a false scent. From Tiger Joe's tone I inferred that Ben must have known that this, not Benson's, was the point against which the Indians intended to bear."

"I don't like that man Small," said Alice. "To me he has the appearance of being by nature what he is in name, and there is a sneaking, treacherous look in his eyes I don't like."

"His is the only presence that detracts from the pleasure of this settlement," spoke Mrs. Vernon; "for so large a colony of men I think these trappers are very gentlemanly and live harmoniously together. I particularly admire Tiger Joe, and have often thought since we have been here that if I could only find my lost boy I should be perfectly happy to find him possessed of the disposition and good traits of this man."

"Yes," assented Mrs. Justin, who was strangely quiet and reserved in her manner, "it would be very nice to find the boys like him."

They sat thus quietly conversing within the hut—the women talking of their lost boys, the two men anxiously debating the probability of the trappers arriving in advance of the savages, while Harry strove to encourage Alice by boasting of what he would do in her defense should the reds make their appearance—when a shout and loud pounding upon the gate startled them.

Mr. Justin hastened out and asked:

"Who's there?"

"It's Small; open the gate."

"Where are the rest of the boys?" asked Justin, suspiciously.

"They'll soon be here. Tiger Joe sent me on ahead to tell you they were near at hand."

Without further hesitation Mr. Justin at once opened the gate.

What followed was done with the precision of clockwork and almost lightning-like rapidity.

Ben Small entered, and with one swift movement of his arm felled the unsuspecting man to the ground, where he lay as one dead.

Then he proceeded toward the hut, followed by Bear Face and half a dozen of his braves.

Ben entered the hut.

"Hello, Ben!" exclaimed Harry, "are all the boys here?"

"Yes," was the reply; "they're outside, and Mr. Justin wants you all to come out."

Without suspecting any treachery, Mr. Vernon and Harry left the hut, followed by the women.

Scarcely were they outside than the two men were seized and bound and slung roughly to one side.

As he was being bound Harry heard a piercing scream, and turning his gaze in that direction, saw Alice struggling in the grasp of two savages, who were bearing her away, while standing in the door of the hut were Mrs. Vernon and Mrs. Justin, their features distorted with terror.

Just then Mrs. Justin's eyes fell upon the form of her husband lying near the gate, and uttering a cry that rang out on the night air, she darted through the gate and in the direction taken by Alice and her captors, followed by several of the Indians.

An answering shout came from the distance, the tramping of horses' feet was heard, and in a few moments the trappers, headed by Tiger Joe, rode up to the spot.

"Too late, boys; the red varmints hev gin us the slip," exclaimed Joe, as he dismounted and entered the stockade.

He was quickly followed by the balance of the party, who soon acquainted themselves with the state of affairs.

Harry and Mr. Vernon were released from the thongs that bound them, and Mrs. Vernon was discovered lying in a swoon across the door-sill of the hut.

Mr. Justin was found to be simply stunned, and quickly recovered.

The poor man's grief was terrible to witness when he learned that his wife and daughter were both in the hands of the savages.

"Oh, God!" he groaned, "was it not enough to lose a son, that I have now to see my wife and child wrested from me? What is there now for me to live for?" and he sank helplessly to the ground, giving way entirely to his excessive grief.

"You've much ter live fer," said Tiger Joe. "Live fer revenge! It'll be better, an' a dang sight more satisfyin', to give up ther ghost knowin' that yer hev sent some o' them pesky varmints ter thar last huntin'-grounds than ter give right up now without makin' an effort."

"Besides," added Harry, "remember that we have to save Mrs. Justin and Alice from the clutches of the savages."

"You are both right," responded Mr. Justin, rising to his feet, "it was foolish in me to give way to my grief so. I know I have much to live for, and a deep score to settle with those Indian fiends. I swear not to rest until I have meted out to them the full measure of suffering they have caused me!"

"Right!" exclaimed Tiger Joe, with an approving slap upon the shoulder, "an' you'll find all the boys with you."

Severe comment was made upon Ben Small's agency in the affair, and the result of the disclosures made by Tiger Joe and our own friends was the general vow made by the trappers:

"Old man, we'll find yer wimmin, an' we'll hang that sneaking Ben Small!"

And each man meant what he said.

CHAPTER III.

THE FOREST MYSTERY—TIGER JOE CAPTURED.

EARLY the following morning a rescuing party was made up to go in search of the captive women.

This party consisted of a dozen trappers led by Long Jim, so called because of his immense height and slim build, and they were accompanied by Justin, Vernon and Harry.

Tiger Joe, true to his nature, started alone in a different direction.

"I kin do better by myself," he said, in reply to our friend's remonstrance against this division.

"Surely you can do nothing alone," urged Justin; "a dozen rifles are better than one."

"So they be when thar's fightin' to be did, but I don't calc'late on doin' enny. I intend to find out whar the varmints hev took the gal an' her mother."

"And then?"

"Why, then I'll give Long Jim the tip, an' we'll rescue 'em."

"It appears to me that will be a waste of time," said Justin, impatiently.

"Don't yer see, Mister Justin, that the forest ar' full o' the imps, an' thet a number o' men couldn't go through without fitin' every step o' the way? Then, agin, ef the reds know the boys ar' on the trail they'll hide the wimmin so's we can't find 'em; but ef the crowd goes one way an' I go the other, I kin sarcumvent the imps and we kin strike the right trail."

"Joe's kerrect," said Jim. "Jest yer let him be an' everythin' 'll be all right. We've got our signals, an' we won't lose track o' each other."

"Well," replied Justin, "I will try and curb my impatience, praying that God may generously reward you all for the interest you take in my sorrow."

"Bless you, man," responded Joe, "we're jest in our glory when we're sarcumventin' them red fiends. But good-bye; I'll bring you good news afore long, providin' Long Jim don't git ahead o' me an' find 'em first."

It was near night of the second day after Tiger Joe's departure from the settlement when he came suddenly upon the trail of two persons.

He examined the footprints closely.

They were fresh, which fact went to prove that the makers were not far off.

"Them chaps bean't Injuns," he muttered, "fer Injuns don't wear boots. Wonder who they be?"

He followed the mysterious footprints for a considerable distance, when he suddenly paused, then darted hurriedly behind a tree.

From this position he beheld the following strange scene:

Before him was a large open plain, the forest skirting it on either side.

Across this plain and into the forest beyond, uttering the most terrific yells, rushed a large number of Indians.

Mounted upon a fleet horse, with neither bit nor bridle, riding at break-neck pace, was a weird-looking creature, with her long hair streaming in the wind, her features distorted with an expression of maniacal rage, and in each hand a blazing torch.

As this strange creature rushed on in her mad course, furiously brandishing her torches, now and then branding with them any unlucky savage who by any mishap chanced within her reach, she would occasionally give utterance to a loud, demoniacal "Ha! ha! ha!" which was enough in itself to curdle the blood in one's veins.

Joe gazed upon the scene with wonder and amazement.

Never in all his border experience had he witnessed a scene like this.

"Zounds!" he exclaimed, "what kind o' a tarnal critter be that? Whar in thunder did she come from, an' who be she? Them's the questions."

His curiosity was doomed to burn on unabated, however, as there appeared none near to answer him.

In a brief space of time the affrighted savages and their pursuer were lost to sight in the dense forest beyond.

But Tiger Joe did not move from his position.

His quick, practiced eye had discovered a commotion in the underbrush but a short distance from the spot upon which he stood.

Slowly a head issued forth, and a pair of scared, wide-opened eyes swept the plain.

Apparently convinced that the coast was clear, the owner of said eyes ventured to emerge slowly from his hiding-place, disclosing to the view of the trapper the massive frame and jovial features—now somewhat deformed by fright—of an Irishman.

"Faith, but that craythur giv' me a devil av a scare," he muttered. "Misther Wallace, phare bez ye?"

In answer to this call a person descended from the very tree beneath which Joe stood.

"Well, Dennis, that was a part not put down in the bills," he said.

"Faith, an' if it hadn't a bin for that she-devil we'd a bin scalped, shure. But phare in the name of St. Pathrick did she spring from?"

"That I can't tell, but I noticed that *we* sprang when she did come."

Joe examined the persons before him very attentively.

They were not backwoodsmen, that was certain. Each wore the habiliments of civilization, without the least approach to the garb of a trapper.

Their clothing, however, was considerably worn, and their whole appearance denoted that they had experienced great exposure and hardships.

At any rate they were white, and therefore friends, so Joe decided upon forming their acquaintance.

Stepping out from behind the tree which sheltered him from their observation, he said:

"Wall, strangers, ye're rather fur away from home, bean't ye?"

"Murther!" exclaimed Dennis, springing back. "Misther Wallace, we're gone now, shure!"

But Wallace saw in the white skin and trapper garb not a foe, but a friend, and he stepped forward and grasped Joe's extended hand.

The three were not long in arriving upon familiar terms, and they decided to spend the night at least in company.

As the spot on which they stood was an eligible site for a camp, they prepared to make themselves comfortable.

Some time before Tiger Joe made his appearance Wallace had shot a fine buck, but before he and Dennis could secure the game they were surprised by a body of savages, attracted by the report of the rifle. They had considered themselves lost, when the mysterious rider appeared, very providentially, as it seemed, and scattered the foe.

Now, however, Dennis went out and soon returned with the animal, off of which they succeeded in making a square meal.

This done, Tiger Joe proposed that in order to while away the time they indulge in relating personal reminiscences.

This was agreed to, and he was about to commence an account of some of his wonderful exploits—Wallace promising to follow with a history of the circumstances that brought him and the Irishman here—when Dennis exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper:

"Howly mither! but that's the quarest animil I've seed yit!"

Joe looked in the direction indicated by Dennis' index finger, and saw slowly creeping toward them what appeared in the deep gloom to be some sort of an animal.

But its manner was very suspicious, and Joe watched it narrowly.

Suddenly he grasped his rifle and took deliberate aim.

He had discovered in the moving body the form of an Indian, who was lying at full length on the ground and was working himself along like a snake.

Joe pulled the trigger.

Immediately succeeding the report of the rifle there arose a deafening yell, and the three white men found themselves confronted by a dozen of their foes, who sprang out from the shadows behind their prostrate companion, whose skull the bullet from Tiger Joe's rifle had penetrated.

Scarcely had the yells of the Indians been uttered than the Irishman threw himself upon the ground and quickly crawled beneath the underbrush, completely covering himself from sight.

Joe observed the act and laughed loudly, the movement being so ludicrous as to cause him to forget for the moment the danger that faced him.

Then turning to Wallace, he said, hastily:

"The imps want me—that's all. They won't hurt me now; what they want is to capture me. Yer kin do me more good by keepin' out o' their clutches. Git as fast as yer kin. I'll take care of the cusses."

Wallace hated to desert his friend, but he knew well that Joe would not so advise him without sufficient reason, so he followed the example set by Dennis and succeeded in secreting himself, as the attention of the savages was wholly taken up with Tiger Joe, who was widely known among them, and whose capture alive they knew would win the fortunate ones who effected it many honors from their chief.

So for some time there was considerable skirmishing—the Indians anxious to draw Joe's fire, and he as anxious to use it only to good advantage.

He knew there was no hope of escaping capture, but he intended that at least one redskin should bite the dust before that thing happened.

It soon became evident that his foes were endeavoring to approach nearer to him by dodging from tree to tree, and as one daringly attempted to leave one tree for another the trapper took aim and fired.

"One pesky varmint the less to bother us, old chap," he muttered, patting his trusty rifle.

Now was the opportunity the reds had been waiting for.

They realized that the scout's rifle was empty, and a rush was made upon him.

The first who ventured near the courageous scout received a stunning blow upon his head from the stock of Tiger Joe's rifle which laid him low, but before it could be used again the savages had grasped him and wrenched the weapon from his hand.

"Ugh!" grunted one. "Tiger Joe caught!"

"Yes, ye tarnal imps, ye! S'pose yer think yer've got me tight this time, but I'll give yer the slip, mind thet!"

"Ugh! pale-face brave, big man. Him make good fire!"

"Not ef he knows hisself!" muttered the trapper as he was led from the spot.

The Indians conducted him to a spot but a short distance away, where some of their comrades had been left in charge of their horses while they reconnoitered the camp of the pale-faces, and here they bivouaced for the night.

Their prisoner was securely bound, and he realized that there was no use in trying to escape at present; so he laid as quiet as possible in his uncomfortable position until the gray dawn of day gradually appeared, when, after partaking of some dried buffalo meat which his captors had with them, they resumed their journey.

Only once did Tiger Joe make an effort to escape.

He was seated astride one of the horses, an Indian riding on either side of him leading the animal.

As the sun neared the zenith the party stopped beside a stream to slake their thirst and refresh themselves with the dried meat.

It was then that Joe conceived a bold plan to give the savages the slip.

The two who led his horse had released their hold and were bending over the clear water, eagerly quaffing thereof.

Now was Joe's time.

He struck his heels hard against the sides of his horse and urged him on with a shout.

The animal sprang forward and darted off at a rapid pace.

The trapper's hands were bound, and he knew that the chances were that the beast would carry him into the presence of another gang of his foes, but he trusted that the fates would favor his escape on this as on many former occasions.

He had placed some distance between himself and his surprised escort when his plan was suddenly frustrated.

A shrill whistle from one of the savages caused the horse to prick up his ears, then slacken his speed.

The signal was repeated.

With a loud neigh the noble animal turned and sped back to the spot where its master stood.

"Ugh!" said one, with a grin, "him Ossawa's horse. Him no leave Ossawa."

This incident convinced Tiger Joe that escape for the present was impossible, and he remained submissive for the rest of the journey.

Late in the afternoon they reached their destination, a populous Indian village, where Joe was destined to remain but a brief period.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FOREST MYSTERY ENABLES TIGER JOE TO RESCUE ALICE.

WHEN Alice found herself in the grasp of two stalwart savages, and realized how foully the little garrison had been betrayed by the treachery of Ben Small, she was for the moment stupefied.

Then, as it dawned upon her that she was a captive, and her gaze fell upon the prostrate form of Mr. Justin, she gave utterance to the shriek which had so startled Harry and lost consciousness.

When she revived she found herself in charge of four Indians a short distance outside of the stockade.

In the bright moonlight she could plainly discern the form of her mother in the door of the hut.

It would be difficult to describe her feelings as she observed the look of anguish on her mother's face, and saw her rush through the gateway, pursued by the savages.

Then Alice was hurried away, the scenes of the past half hour vividly impressed upon her mind, and that last despairing look of her mother constantly haunting her.

Her feelings were so intense that it seemed as though she were suffocating, and it was impossible for her to shed the tears which filled her eyes and choked her utterance.

Her captors finally placed her upon a horse, and, closely guarded, she was led quickly away.

She closely scanned the features of her escort—all were grim and stern; she could hope for no mercy from them.

The idea of attempting to escape never occurred to her, for what chance had she against such odds? She a frail girl—her captors stalwart men.

Even were she to succeed in eluding them the probabilities were that she would only fall into the hands of others.

As they proceeded her mind became gradually calmer, as she reasoned that her trapper friends would certainly make an effort to rescue her.

After a continuous march of many hours they arrived at the Indian village, and Alice was given in charge of two women.

While being conducted to her quarters she glanced inquiringly about her, curiosity getting the better of her fears.

She had read and heard much concerning the villages of the red men, and now that she was actually in one she wanted to see how near it corresponded with the descriptions to which she had listened.

There were many rows of rude huts, around which scores of dirty, half-naked children played; but when they caught sight of Alice they flocked about her, curiously examining her person and dress.

The women, too, exercised the inquisitiveness of their sex and followed Alice as she was led to the center of the village and lodged in a hut.

She was attended and guarded by two of her sex, one of whom brought in some food which, though coarse, was very acceptable in her half-famished state.

Fatigued with her long and tiresome journey, she lay down and sank into a sound and refreshing sleep.

How long she slept she knew not, but the feeling of some strange presence finally awakened her.

Opening her eyes, she saw standing beside her rude couch a muscular savage enveloped in a robe made of the skins of various animals, his feet encased in moccasins of beautiful workmanship, and his head bedecked with a plume of gay feathers.

Alice sprang up with a low cry of alarm.

"Ugh!" grunted her visitor, "me no hurt white maiden."

Saying this, he reached out his hand and stroked her head, murmuring:

"Um very fair—um pretty."

Alice drew back, her eyes flashing indignantly.

"Ugh! Tiger Lily," said the Indian, smiling.

He folded his arms, and stood gazing admiringly upon her.

"Tiger Lily no be 'fraid. Bear Face no hurt her," he added.

So this was Bear Face, the chief of the Ossawas?

Alice had heard much of him from the trappers, but had never expected to see the day when she should stand so near him as now.

She realized, however, that her comfort and safety while in the village depended upon her retaining the good will of the chief, so, stepping up to him and placing her hand on his arm, she asked:

"Why does the great chief call me 'Tiger Lily?'"

"The pale face maiden has the beauty and tenderness of the lily with the spirit of the tiger," replied the Indian, grimly.

Alice was surprised to hear this sentiment emanating from the lips of an untutored savage chieftain, but she smiled her thanks for the compliment and said:

"Well, then, Tiger Lily is not afraid of Bear Face. She did not know that it was he or she would not have shrunk from him, for she knows that the great and powerful chief of the Ossawas is too noble to harm a defenseless maiden."

"Ugh!" grunted the savage, well pleased with her speech.

"But why was Tiger Lily torn from her friends?" pursued Alice.

"Why was she separated from those she loves?"

"The pale face brave loves Tiger Lily," was the reply, "and paid Bear Face's warriors to bring her to the village."

This information astounded and nonplused Alice. She could not imagine who was meant by the "pale face brave."

"Who is this kind friend who has shown his love for me in such a remarkable manner?" she asked.

"Bear Face will send him to Tiger Lily," said the chief, stalking from the hut.

In a few moments the blanket that screened the entrance to the hut was pushed aside and Ben Small entered.

He had a robe thrown over his shoulders, a plume of feathers on his head, and was otherwise disguised as a member of the Ossawa tribe, but Alice easily recognized him.

She sprang to her feet and confronted him, her eyes reflecting the loathing and contempt that filled her soul.

"Ben Small!" she exclaimed. "So you are the traitor and renegade to whom I am indebted for my present condition?"

"There's no use in calling me hard names," he growled. "When I asked you to marry me at the settlement, and you refused and insulted me, I told you that I would get you where you would be glad to be my wife, and I've kept my word."

"But why did you betray your benefactors at the settlement and bring the Indians to murder those I love best on earth?"

"I have just told you. It was because I love you and am determined that you shall be my wife."

"Then let me tell you, Ben Small, that you have had your trouble for your pains, for I would sooner die than wed a sneaking renegade like you!"

"You have your choice," he replied, apparently unabashed by her scornful manner and sharp words, "to either become my wife or else go into the wigwam of one of these Indian devils as his squaw."

"Even that alternative," she exclaimed, "is less distasteful than the thoughts of wedding you."

"There's plenty of time for you to change your mind," he hissed, as he turned and left the hut.

Rid of his presence, Alice's strength deserted her, and she fell upon the couch and wept.

She trembled at the thoughts of her helplessness and the terrible fate that threatened her.

As she lay thus, weeping and moaning, the Indian chief again made his appearance.

Surveying her in silence for a moment, he asked:

"Why does Tiger Lily weep?"

"Because she is persecuted by the treacherous pale face, for whom Bear Face tore her from her friends," she answered.

"Does not Tiger Lily love the pale face?" asked the chief.

"No, I hate him!" she cried. "Oh, chief," she pleaded, placing her hand on his arm and turning her tearful eyes upon his face, "Tiger Lily will bless Bear Face forever if he will prevent the pale face from seeing her again."

The chief placed his hand upon her head caressingly, and answered:

"The pale face will not trouble Tiger Lily any more. Bear Face will send him from the village at once."

As he was leaving the hut he paused at the entrance, and said:

"Tiger Lily very fair. When Bear Face comes back from the hunt he make um him's squaw."

And casting upon her a look of deep admiration, the chief departed.

"God grant that he never return, or else that I may die," wailed Alice, again sinking upon the couch.

For the next three days she occupied her time in roaming about the village, associating with the Indian women, and making friends of all by her gentle, winning ways.

She was gratified upon finding that Bear Face had kept his word and banished Ben Small from the village.

The chief, however, still remained, deferring his hunting expedition from day to day.

He was very respectful toward Alice, and showed her many little acts of kindness, for which she was very grateful.

Toward the close of the third day of her captivity a commotion arose, caused by the entrance into the village of a band of braves, having in charge a white captive.

When this information reached the ears of Alice she rushed toward the group, her heart beating wildly with the hope that it might be some one she knew.

As she neared the spot the Indians who crowded about gave way and allowed her to pass to where the prisoner stood.

Her eyes no sooner met his than she gave a glad shout and threw her arms about his neck.

"Tiger Joe! Oh, I am so glad to see you!"

"Alice Justin!" exclaimed Joe, for it was indeed he. "Sure it's not yer ghost? I warn't glad that I war here awhile ago, but now I'd hug yer ef my hands war loose, I'm thet glad."

Alice turned toward Bear Face, who stood near by gazing grimly upon the scene, and said:

"This is one of Tiger Lily's dear friends. Will not Bear Face loose his hands that he may embrace her?"

The chief shook his head.

"Tiger Joe big prize; me no lose him," he said.

"But he will not abuse Bear Face's confidence. Will you, Joe?" urged Alice.

The chief looked at the scout inquiringly.

"Old man," said Joe, "you've got me trapped, an' I acknowledge the corn. So ef you'll jest take these confounded thongs off my wrists I'll be as meek as a fourth squaw."

With a motion to his braves to release Joe, the chief said:

"Bear Face do it cause him love Tiger Lily."

"What! the Ossawa chief love me?" exclaimed Joe, with a laugh.

He had not understood the appellation given to Alice, and confounded Tiger Lily with his own soubriquet, Tiger Joe.

"Ugh!" said the chief, with an expression of scorn. "Bear Face hate Tiger Joe—him love Tiger Lily," pointing to Alice.

"Oh-h!" said Joe. "I thought it funny thet the red chief should hev fallen in love with me at this late day."

While this by-play was progressing the thongs had been severed and the trapper's arms were made free.

He embraced Alice, and whispered as he did so:

"Hev courage; yer father and Harry are on the trail, an' we'll soon be out o' this."

She uttered a joyful cry and rested her head upon his shoulder, the tears of joy welling from her eyes.

She had believed her father dead, and the assurance that he was still living filled her heart with thankfulness.

"And mother," she asked, "is she—"

But the remainder of her question was drowned in a terrible commotion which at that instant arose.

The Indians uttered a loud shout of fear and suddenly dispersed.

The two captives turned their gaze toward the spot where the disturbance seemed most violent, and for a moment even they were startled by the scene they witnessed.

Coming from the direction of the forest, riding a fleet horse and waving in each hand a blazing torch, was the strange being whom Joe had designated as the "mystery of the forest."

As she approached the village she uttered that blood-curdling "Ha, ha, ha!" and shouted at intervals:

"Avaunt, ye murderers!"

The shades of night were falling fast, and it was just dark enough to heighten the weirdness of the scene, the bright glare of the torches bringing into clearer view each witch-like feature, the long, flowing hair and the maniacal expression.

Tiger Joe recovered from his surprise, and his quick mind soon grasped the lay of the field.

The Indians were scattered in great confusion, and the greatest uproar prevailed.

"Now," said he to Alice, who was still resting on his arm, "now is our time; make no noise, but trust to me."

He received no answer, and glancing into her face, discovered that she was unconscious.

"So much the better," he muttered.

Stooping down he picked up his rifle, which one of his captors, having it in charge, had dropped in his fright, lifted Alice in his arms as he would a child, and darted off in an opposite direction from that taken by the fleeing Indians.

CHAPTER V.

THE BURNING VILLAGE—ALICE STRANGELY DISAPPEARS.

"BEDAD, but I'm thinkin' we'll be afther havin' some dirty work purty soon."

"What's up, Dennis?"

"Well, Mистер Wallace, thim murtherin' spalpeens hev come back thicker'n' miskeeters."

"Ha! what have you seen?"

"I was on the hill beyant, kapin' an' eye on the naggur's nist on the ithér side, whin I heard a yellin' an' a scrachin' an' a crowd ov thim red divils come stalkin' in—may the devil take 'em all!"

"Then we must be doubly watchful. I don't feel disposed to leave these quarters right away. So good a hiding-place is not easily found."

"Bad cess to the counthry, sez I. I'd a dale rather we'd gone to the bottom of the Specific than to hev come here to be scalped."

"Pacific, Dennis. As for myself, I have no misgivings. I feel confident that we shall get out of these cursed wilds safely. I believe I shall yet succeed in finding my friend Joe, and then for home and parents. Ten years is a long while to have been away from one's home, Dennis. Thank God, I shall be back there soon, and then, my mission being ended, I'll settle down to a steady shore life. We'll secure our treasure, Dennis, and we'll live like kings the balance of our lives."

"Yes, if we bean't scalped like dogs out here," muttered the Irishman, moodily.

The place where we find our old acquaintances, Wallace and Dennis, is in a cave on the shore of a beautiful lake.

After witnessing the capture of Tiger Joe, which it would have been folly for him to attempt to prevent, and waiting until the Indians had got well out of the way, Wallace had joined Dennis and the two walked on without further adventure until they reached this lake.

Following its western shore, the land rising in some places gradually, in others almost perpendicularly, and being thickly wooded, they had come across a spot which presented a secure and comfortable resting place in the shape of a natural cave in the bank at a point where it rose perpendicularly and to a considerable height.

The two men easily succeeded in so building up the entrance as to secure the cave from discovery.

Wild game in plenty came to the lake to drink, and they secured food and skins.

The above conversation was interrupted by a succession of shrieks and yells that rang out on the still air with startling distinctness.

"Mither av Moses! phat's that?" exclaimed Dennis.

Wallace hastily sprang to his feet, grasped his rifle, and peered cautiously from the cave.

The cries of terror continued, coming apparently from beyond the hill back of where he stood.

"There's something going on in the village," he said, "and I'm going to see what it is."

"Shure an' ye'd not be afther goin' out while thim divils bez about?" asked Dennis.

"Yes, I'm bound to learn the cause of this commotion. There's something unusual going on over there. But you can remain here if you prefer."

"Faith, an' I'd rather go, thin, if it plaze ye. I'd sooner be scalped wid ye than be left in this murtherin' counthry alone. Bad cess to the varmints!"

"Come on, then," said Wallace, as he pushed aside the brushwood and stepped outside.

"Howld on, Misther Wallace," said Dennis, hesitating; "phat can we two do agin that gang ov bloody murtherers? Better let thim dance their hornpipes in pace, an' kape an eye on our scalps."

"We can do nothing, Dennis, but satisfy ourselves as to the cause of this unearthly noise. If you are going, come on; if not, get inside and lay low."

"Come on it is, thin. Begorra, it's not Dennis O'Harra that'll be afther howldin' yez back!"

The two men wended their way cautiously up the side of the steep bank.

"Hist!"

They had reached the top of the hill, from which a good view of the Indian village, situated about a quarter of a mile away, could be obtained, and the sight which met his gaze caused Wallace to utter this warning in a low tone, and to draw Dennis back in the shelter of the trees, that their presence might not be discovered should any of the savages chance to look in that direction.

"Dennis, there's our old friend, the mysterious woman," said Wallace.

Just then came that shrill cry:

"Avaunt, ye murderers!"

"Look at the divils," said Dennis; "faith, an' they run like scar'd sheep!"

The scene that followed is beyond description.

The Indians scattered here and there, their mysterious persecutor following first one party and then another, her maniacal shrieks rising high above the yells of pain and fear uttered by the Indian men, women and children.

It was a strange sight to Wallace—such a large number of stalwart men fleeing before a single woman.

But her sudden and unearthly appearance, the mystery attending her, her entire control over the wild horse she rode, though she used neither bit nor bridle, all combined to arouse their superstitious awe.

"Fare and 'ounds!" exclaimed Dennis, grasping his companion by the arm, "Misther Wallace, look there!"

Wallace quickly glanced in the direction indicated and saw a man rapidly approaching the spot where he stood, bearing in his arms a young girl.

"Escaped prisoners, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "Make haste, Dennis, and have the cave ready opened. When he gets near enough I'll call to the man and bring him and his burden to our hiding-place."

As Dennis disappeared, Wallace cautiously signaled to the approaching party, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing that he was observed.

As the man drew near to where he stood, and deposited his burden upon the ground, Wallace exclaimed in amazement:

"Tiger Joe, as I live!"

"Yas, Tiger Joe all whole," replied the trapper; "but let's git somewhar' out o' sight afore them ar' skinflints come to thar senses."

"Follow me," said Wallace, "I have a snug hiding-place ready for you."

He led the way and Joe followed with Alice, the latter now conscious, and the safe shelter of the cave was soon reached.

"Thar, Miss Alice, yer in better quarters nor those yer war in a little while ago," said Joe.

"And I am so thankful to you, Joe," she replied.

"T'warn't me as done it," he said; "'twas that she critter as scar'd the life near out o' the imps."

"Well, she made her appearance at just the right moment. But, Joe, tell me again that father and Harry are alive."

"They ar', jest as sartain as thet I left 'em in the flesh only a week ago."

"You don't know, Joe, how that information relieves me. I was so distracted with the belief that they had been killed; it made me feel so lonely and desolate."

"Wall, yer kin cheer up now, fer ef Tiger Joe knows hisself, they ar' both on yer trail at the present minnit."

This assurance afforded Alice great comfort, and the thought of soon meeting her father and Harry filled her heart with joy.

"Hear, Miss Alice," said Joe, "while I think o' it, yer'd better take this, fer thar's no knowin' how soon yer'll need somethin' o' the sort."

He handed her a pistol, which she concealed upon her person, and then, overcome by the excitement of the past hour, she reclined upon the couch of skins that Wallace had considerably prepared for her, and soon sank into a sound sleep.

"It beats me all holler," said Joe, as the three men sat at one side discussing the events of that and the previous day, "who thet tarnal critter kin be. She ar' somethin' as has sprung up in these parts all o' a suddint. I never heard o' her nor seen her before thet day I fust met you."

"It is some escaped lunatic, no doubt," said Wallace.

"It's a she-divil, enyway," replied Joe, "an' she looked like one, every inch o' her. Zounds! thet yell o' hern made my blood run cold, an' I don't blame the reds fer bein' scared."

Dennis, who a moment before had gone outside, suddenly entered the cave, exclaiming:

"Howly mither!"

"What's up, Dennis?" asked Joe.

"Jist yez be afther comin' here an' see phat thim murderin' divils hev got fer their cussedness. Faith, but that ugly witch has raised the very divil."

Wallace and Tiger Joe hastened to the mouth of the cave, and dis-

covered the sky lit up with a lurid glare, making everything almost as plainly discernible as in mid-day.

"That crazy witch, fer she must be one, has set fire to the village, by jingo!" exclaimed the trapper.

"It must be a beautiful sight," said Wallace. "Let us go up and take a look at it."

The three men hastened to the top of the bank, leaving Alice asleep in the cave.

Reaching a point from which a view of the Indian village could be obtained, a beautiful and thrilling sight met their gaze.

All the huts were in flames, illuminating the clearing with a picturesque brilliancy, while grouped together on the outer edge of the forest and away from the intense heat were the red men, women and children, bemoaning the loss of their homes.

But soon a startling sensation occurred.

Out from the thick woods behind the group again dashed the strange rider who had once before that night so terrified the Indians and destroyed their lodges, uttering her shrill command:

"Avaunt, ye murderers!"

And as the savages, completely demoralized, scattered to the right and left, seeking refuge from this dread creature, their pursuer's voice rang out in a loud, blood-curdling laugh of maniacal glee which startled even the beasts of the forest and sent them flying toward their lairs.

"Murder, murder! Howly saints presarve us!"

This exclamation caused Wallace and his companion to look toward the Irishman, whose ridiculous position caused them to laugh loudly.

Dennis lay at full length upon the ground, his head concealed beneath a clump of bushes, his legs beating time in the air to the unearthly music coming from the Indian village.

"Gad, boys!" exclaimed Tiger Joe, suddenly, "the imps are scatterin' this way! Let's be gittin' under cover!"

It was true.

About a hundred savages, pursued by the weird rider, were rushing toward them.

Wallace and Dennis hastened to the cave, and Joe, after pausing long enough to see the reds turn in another direction, followed.

As he arrived in sight of the cave he perceived Wallace coming rapidly toward him, his manner flurried and a wild, frightened look in his eyes.

"What's the matter?" anxiously queried the trapper.

"Good heavens, Joe," was the reply, "the girl's gone!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE STRANGE RIDER CAPTURES BEAR FACE—A THRILLING SCENE.

ALTHOUGH the Ossawa chief, Bear Face, was himself greatly frightened at the appearance of the mysterious and dread female rider, who had so terrified and demoralized his people, filling the hearts even of his best warriors with fear, yet he retained sufficient command of himself to think of his beautiful captive.

He had abducted Alice at the instigation of Ben Small, who had paid him well for the work. But once in his power and under his eye the grim chieftain's heart had been fired, then captivated by the beauty and winning ways of the young girl, and he had driven Ben from the village, determining to reserve the pale-face maiden for his own wiggam.

Now his village was being consumed by the relentless flames, and his strong desire was to flee from the presence of his mysterious foe, but above his fears rose the image of "Tiger Lily," whom he wished to take with him in his flight.

Prompted by this feeling, he turned toward the spot on which his prisoners had stood but a few moments before.

To his dismay, both were gone.

Hastily sweeping the plain with his eagle eye, he discovered Tiger Joe, with Alice in his arms, just entering the stretch of woods covering the hill between him and the lake.

Hastening in an opposite direction, the chief soon reached the lake shore and cautiously advanced toward the point at which the fugitives had disappeared.

Suddenly he paused and drew back into the shade of the bank.

He had just observed our friends emerging from the cave and ascending the bank to look at the burning village.

Waiting until they had got out of sight, the chief retraced his steps

a short distance and launched a canoe, which he drew from its hiding-place in a recess in the bank.

Securing this, Bear Face returned to the cave and quietly entered.

As his gaze rested upon the form of the sleeping girl he uttered an exclamation of satisfaction that awoke Alice.

Upon opening her eyes and beholding the chief standing by her, she screamed loudly and attempted to rise.

With a quick motion Bear Face threw over her the blanket he wore, and lifting her in his arms as he would a child, bore her rapidly out of the cave.

In a few seconds his precious burden was deposited in the bottom of the canoe and he was paddling the frail craft swiftly through the calm waters of the lake.

After getting safely out of the glare of the burning village, Bear Face removed the blanket and permitted Alice to sit upright.

She gazed about her, fully realizing the helplessness of her condition.

In the distance could be seen a reddish glare, arising from the raging fire, while they were surrounded by deep darkness and gloom.

"Why does Bear Face tear the white maiden from her friends?" she asked.

"Bear Face love Tiger Lily," was the reply. "Him make her him's squaw."

Alice shuddered at this declaration, but before she could make answer the prow of the canoe grated upon the shore.

Landing, the chief secreted the canoe and bade his captive follow him.

The girl obeyed.

Following on behind the chief, a sudden inspiration suggested a means of escape.

Like a flash it occurred to her that in her possession was the pistol that Tiger Joe had given her in the cave.

This indeed offered a chance for deliverance.

The stalwart Indian chief walked rapidly on before her.

It would be the work of but a moment to discharge the contents of the weapon into his back, fly to the lake, take the canoe and return to her friends.

This thought caused her to tremble so that she could scarcely walk.

The plan promised freedom, but at what a cost.

It would necessitate the taking of a human life—the staining of her hands with blood.

But, on the other hand, this savage was an enemy to her race.

He had torn her from her friends, and had declared for her a fate to escape which she would gladly welcome death.

This latter consideration decided her.

"I will do it," she murmured, "and may God nerve my arm!"

She drew forth the pistol, cocked it, and took deliberate aim at the Indian before her, who was pushing on, all unconscious of the danger that menaced him.

But it was not destined that the life of Bear Face should be taken at that particular time.

Just as Alice was about to press upon the trigger, which act would send the leaden messenger of death upon its deadly mission, she was startled by a sound as of rushing wind, followed by a demoniacal yell, then the words:

"Ha, ha, ha! ye red murderer!"

And, dashing furiously by the startled girl, rode the mysterious Nemesis, guiding her horse close beside the affrighted Indian.

Casting aside one of her blazing torches, she grasped the long hair of the chief and continued on in her mad course.

It was a thrilling scene.

Seated upon a wild horse of the plain, in one hand a blazing torch, the fingers of the other firmly entwining the hair of the terror-stricken chief, rode the weird creature with the fleetness of the wind.

On, on through village and camp she sped, dragging her dusky captive, whose yells of fear and agony resounded on the still air.

Recovering from the shock caused by this unexpected and thrilling scene, Alice breathed a fervent prayer of thanksgiving at her miraculous escape, and quickly returned to the lake.

She had no difficulty in launching the light canoe, and, entering it, she paddled back toward the cave, being guided by the reflection in the sky arising from the still burning village.

CHAPTER VII.

ALICE AGAIN WITH HER FRIENDS—DENNIS HIDES.

"Good heavens, Joe, the girl's gone!"

This exclamation from Wallace's lips, as recorded in a previous chapter, fell with startling distinctness upon Tiger Joe's ear.

Without pausing to reply he rushed past his companion, and entered the cave.

Nothing was disarranged, and there was nothing to indicate that a struggle had taken place.

But the girl was missing, and Joe reasoned that she would not have left the cave at that hour by herself and of her own free will.

Closely examining the ground at the entrance to the cave, the trapper's experienced eye speedily discovered the manner of Alice's disappearance.

In the soft clay were plainly discernible the prints of moccasined feet.

Calling Wallace's attention to these, Joe exclaimed:

"That fiend, Bear Face, has stole the gal!"

"How can you tell that?" asked Wallace.

"By the marks o' them moccasins. I kin pick out *his* trail from a hundred others."

"Then may God help her!" fervently ejaculated Wallace. "But where are you going?" he asked, as Joe started off, his eyes intently fixed upon the ground.

"I'm goin' ter see whar this trail leads ter."

Wallace followed, and in a few seconds they arrived at the spot at which Bear Face had embarked in the canoe.

"Here's whar the pesky varmint took the gal in a canoe," said Joe.

"How can you tell that?"

"'Cause the marks are so plain yer can't miss seein' 'em."

"I can't see anything unusual."

"Look close. Don't yer see the marks o' ther moccasins thar?"

"Yes."

"An' here's ther mark made by ther canoe whar it war dragged from thet thar clump o' bushes."

"Yes," said Wallace, "it is plain that they took to the water from this point. But which way did they go?"

"Down that way," replied Joe, tersely.

"What makes you think so?"

"'Cause Bear Face would nat'rally get as fer away from ther village an' thet she-devil as he could."

Wallace had to acknowledge that this reasoning was plausible.

The moon had now risen, and shed its luminous rays over the earth, which, added to the glare from the burning village, made it easy to discern various objects on the lake and on land.

Both peered closely in the direction which it was supposed the chief had gone, but could see no trace of living being.

"What are we to do now?" asked Wallace.

"It ar' plain," answered Joe, "thet only Bear Face ar' with ther gal, an' if we two can't master him then we'd better give up ther ghost."

"Then you propose following?"

"Sartin. I started out ter find thet gal an' take her back ter her father an' lover, an' I'm bound ter finish ther job."

Returning to the cave, and directing Dennis to remain there until they returned, the two men started out and walked rapidly along the shore of the lake.

They had traveled some distance, when both suddenly paused and gazed wonderingly at each other.

Ring out upon the stillness of the night air, falling upon their ears with startling distinctness, came that burst of maniacal laughter, followed by the Indian's cry of terror and distress.

"That she-devil agin, by Jove!" cried Joe.

Again came a series of yells, with the cry echoing from the distance:

"Our chief, Bear Face! the demon has our chief, Bear Face!"

"Ther mischief's ter play over thar!" said Joe.

"But the girl," said Wallace. "If that strange creature has captured the chief, what has become of the girl? The poor thing may be in a worse plight now than before."

"Thet's so," replied Joe. "Let's git thar as quick as we kin!"

They hastened their steps, but had not gone far when Joe stopped suddenly, and grasping Wallace by the arm, pointed out upon the lake.

The latter looked and saw a canoe being propelled swiftly through the smooth water.

"That doesn't look like an Indian," he remarked.

"It bean't, nuther!" said Joe, in an excited tone; "don't yer see? It's ther gal!"

"You're right! Thank God, the brave girl has escaped."

Approaching close to the water's edge, Joe cautiously shouted:

"Alice!"

Alice, whom it really was, ceased her efforts at the paddle and strained her eyes shoreward, having recognized Joe's voice.

The sight of the two men filled her heart with joy, and, turning the prow of the canoe that way, she was soon in their presence.

Dennis lay at full length upon the skins within the cave, quietly dozing, when he was aroused by the sound of approaching footsteps which soon paused before the entrance.

There was a quick motion on his part, and then the brush was pushed aside and Tiger Joe, Wallace and Alice entered.

"Where is Dennis?" she inquired.

"Ain't ther Paddy here?" asked Joe. "Ther reds ain't carried him off, hev they?"

With an amused smile Wallace pointed toward the pile of skins.

There lay Dennis, the skins covering only his head, while he was doubtless glorying in the thought that he was hidden from all prying eyes.

"Away wid yees!" he shouted as Wallace grasped his feet.

"Why, Dennis," said Alice, with a merry laugh, drawing the skins from his head, "you are certainly not afraid of us?"

"Tare an' 'ounds! Bez it yees, Miss Alice, an' in the flesh? Phwat in the divil 'll happ'n nixt?"

Alice related her startling experiences of the past two hours, and the dramatic scene attending the capture of the Indian chief.

The hour being late, our friends sought rest in sleep, Tiger Joe assuring Alice that in the morning they would begin a march toward the settlement, on the way to which they would doubtless be met by her father and Harry.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAPPERS ON THE TRAIL—SOUNDS OF A CONFLICT.

On the same day that Tiger Joe left the settlement to begin his search for the missing women a party of a dozen trappers, led by Long Jim and accompanied by Messrs. Justin, Vernon and Harry, started in a contrary direction.

The trappers were noble-looking fellows, each one appearing to be a host in himself; and the willingness of these kings of the border to go forth, facing danger and perhaps sacrificing their lives in his cause, aroused within Mr. Justin a deep feeling of respect and gratitude.

Grasping each by the hand, he gave expression to the emotions that filled his breast.

"Wall, now, friend Justin," said Long Jim, "yer mustn't let thet trouble yer. Jest bar in mind thet we're here in ther nat'el line o' our bis'ness, an' if we lose our bar in savin' yer wimmin, why, it's only what we all expect 'll happin ter us some time—hey, boys?"

"Yer bet!" was the hearty response.

It must be said that while the trappers sympathized with their afflicted friends, and readily risked their lives in the effort to rescue the captives, yet their ardor was strengthened by the bitter hatred each entertained toward the Indians, and in thus going forth to meet and outwit them they were merely following the natural bent of their inclinations, being in their glory when upon the red man's trail.

The monotony of the journey was relieved by them with jokes and narratives of personal encounters with Indians and the wild beasts of the forest.

On the other hand, our three friends walked apart by themselves, their thoughts and conversation dwelling upon the probabilities of rescuing the loved ones.

It may well be imagined what mental agony Mr. Justin endured as he pictured to himself the possible fate of his wife and daughter, while Harry's grief at Alice's peril was almost as intense, the young people having been lovers from childhood.

But not until visited by this trial had he realized how dear she was to him.

He had given expression to his feelings in this regard to Mr. Justin as they sat together while the party was encamped on the evening of

the third day, and the bereaved father cordially grasped the hand of his young companion and assured him of his hearty approval of the attachment that existed between him and his daughter.

"Isn't it strange," said Mr. Justin to Long Jim, later in the evening, "that we don't hear from Tiger Joe?"

"It ar' mighty cur'us," was the reply, "thet we ain't bin across enny o' his signals; but he'll turn up all right, never you fear."

"I have no doubt that Tiger Joe has been captured," said Harry, as Jim walked away and joined his companions; "otherwise we would have heard from him before this."

"Yes," answered Mr. Justin, "he has the reputation of being a clever and acute scout, and I believe were he not in the power of the Indians we should have seen him ere this."

"Do you know that man has a familiar look to me," said Mr. Vernon. "I can't free my mind of the idea that I have met him before. Have you noticed in him a resemblance to any one you know, Mr. Justin?"

"Who?"

"Tiger Joe."

"No. In fact, I have paid no particular attention to his features."

"It is strange; I am almost certain that I have seen his face before, yet I cannot place it," responded Mr. Vernon, reflectively.

Some time after this conversation, all having settled themselves down for a night's rest, the party was aroused by a terrible commotion.

The course of the strange female rider who had terrified the Ossawas and captured their chief led close by the camp, the members of which were drawn to their feet by the sharp cries of agony emanating from the terror-stricken Bear Face, and the shrieks and laughter of his captor.

Swiftly by them she rode, dragging the unfortunate savage, who was now half dead from the rough usage he had received in his contact with the trees and underbrush.

"What in tarnation's that?" exclaimed Long Jim, in astonishment.

"It's either a witch or the devil," said another.

"One or t'other," replied Jim. "It ar' somethin' I never seen in these here parts afore."

"But who was that she had in tow?"

"Give it up. They went by so tarnal fast I couldn't see either o' 'em well. Whoever 'twas, though, won't hev much life or grit in him by mornin'."

And Jim was right.

The next day, at a point some distance from there, they discovered, lying between two saplings which had evidently caught and released him from the clutch of the mad rider, the bruised and mangled body of the Indian chief.

His career on earth was ended, and no more would he lead his braves to the hunt or battle.

It was the evening of the fourth day of their march.

Darkness had spread its pall over the earth, and the party had dismounted and were preparing to encamp for the night.

Suddenly the stillness of the night was broken by the sharp report of a rifle.

In an instant each man was again in the saddle.

Another report soon followed, and the trappers prepared to advance.

Almost immediately their ears were pierced by a whoop which they knew could come from the throats of no less than a score of savages.

"Whew!" exclaimed Jim, "thar's tarnation ugly work ahead thar, boys."

This opinion was confirmed a moment later, when a loud scream was heard.

"Dod rot it!" shouted Jim, "thar's a woman in ther scrape, sure's ' life! Come on, boys."

No further invitation was needed.

Putting spurs to their horses, they dashed off at break-neck speed in the direction from whence the sounds of disturbance came.

CHAPTER IX.

DENNIS' SACRIFICE—HE AND ALICE CAPTURED.

THE inmates of the cave awoke refreshed and reinvigorated on the morning following the exciting events they had passed through.

After partaking of a hearty breakfast, they prepared a supply of meat to take with them, and began their journey in the direction of the settlement.

"I don't care a snap fer myself," said Tiger Joe, "fer I'm used to trampin'; but I wish we had a horse fer yer, Miss Alice."

"Don't borrow any trouble on my account," she replied. "The thought that I am journeying toward my father will strengthen my feet and lighten the way, however rough and tedious."

"Bedad, but that's a mighty nate spache," said Dennis. "But it's mysil' as is afther thinkin' that a horse 'ud come handy ef thim red divils tuk a notion to come 'round."

"Yer needn't fear," said Tiger Joe; "thar's plenty o' bushes whar yer kin hide yer head."

"Dennis is like the ostrich—he thinks if his head is out of sight his body is safe," laughed Wallace.

"Divil a bit do I care fer my fate," said Dennis, "but it 'ud be a murtherin' pity fer a likely chap loike me ter go home ter ould Ireland wid the top av my head off."

All day they continued their weary march, meeting with no adventure of any consequence.

As the sun sank behind the trees, noting the approach of night, they began to discuss the advisability of looking for an eligible spot upon which to camp.

Although they had met with no Indians during the day, yet Tiger Joe well knew from experience that the savages were apt to spring up from almost any point and at any moment, especially after dark, and that their safest course lay in seeking a camping ground as remote from observation as possible.

In answer to Wallace's suggestion that they had covered sufficient ground for that day, the trapper said:

"It bean't hardly safe fer us ter stop here. If yer kin tramp on fer about a mile further I kin take yer ter a secure place an' whar thar's no danger o' bein' bothered by the reds."

"I would certainly favor pressing on, then," said Wallace, "provided Miss Alice is not too greatly fatigued."

"It is true," replied Alice, "that I am very tired, but I would much prefer keeping on if there is a prospect of lying down in a place where I can feel secure."

"Divil a bit av diff'rence does it make ter me," said Dennis; "my fate ar' as tough as a chicken, an' I fale as lively as an elephant."

These various opinions decided the matter, and they resumed their march.

After walking for what seemed to the weary travelers to be an age, and just as they began to remark that that mile was a very long one, Tiger Joe came to a sudden stop, saying:

"This ar' ther place."

His companions gazed inquiringly about them.

They looked anxiously for the retreat that had been promised them, but could see nothing but trees, except at one side the monotony was broken by an open space some ten feet square, which was thickly covered with loose brush.

Leaning carelessly against a tree, Tiger Joe watched the perplexed countenances of his companions, his features illumined by an amused smile.

Alice sat upon the trunk of a fallen tree, her eyes wandering about as if in search of the "secure" hiding-place Joe had promised.

She was completely exhausted; her clothing was torn, and her flesh scratched by contact with the briars through which she had passed.

Wallace stood near intently watching her.

It pained him to witness the suffering she was undergoing, but to which, like a true heroine, she gave no voice.

He had done his best to lighten her way, even offering to carry her, but she refused to thus burden him.

She met his expressions of concern for her comfort with a cheerful smile, and strove to lead him to believe that she was but slightly fatigued and not the least discouraged.

He contented himself, therefore, with walking before her, beating down the bushes, putting aside the briars and the branches of young trees, in fact, removing all obstructions from her path, now and then insisting upon taking her in his arms and bearing her over the ditches and creeks they met with on the way.

Dennis seemed greatly perplexed.

He walked here and there, vigorously scratching his head.

"Wall," said Joe, after a few moments' pause, "yer don't seem ter like yer quarters."

"Quarthers, bez it?" exclaimed Dennis. "Divil a quarther does I see. Phare in blazes bez the 'secure' quarthers yez spake ov?"

The scout quietly pointed toward the open space before mentioned.

"That!" sneered the Irishman. "By me faith, hev we walked all this ways fer a howl loike that?"

Joe joined in the laugh this remark produced, and said:

"Jest foller me an' I show yer thet ain't sech a bad hole arter all."

Approaching the space, he removed a portion of the underbrush at one point, disclosing an opening leading into the earth beneath.

Through this the party entered.

By the light of a torch, which Joe provided, they found themselves in what truly promised to be a safe resting place.

It was an underground room, as large as the space above had indicated, and contained a number of skins, with which the ground was covered.

Overhead was a ceiling of logs, with a thick covering of earth, through which here and there protruded the roots of a tree or shrub.

Tiger Joe explained that this spot had been discovered by himself and a party of trappers, and readily appreciated as a good place for a rendezvous.

They accordingly covered the hole with a roof of tree trunks and earth, transplanted young saplings there and thickly strewed the surface with brushwood, thus forming a comfortable and safe headquarters when engaged in hunting and trapping in the winter time.

"This is comfort!" exclaimed Alice, as she sank upon a pile of skins and in a few moments was sleeping soundly.

All felt too tired to think of eating, and Wallace declared that his main want was a good night's sleep.

But Dennis soon made known another, equally as pressing, by remarking:

"Faith, an' bean't there a well in this shanty?"

"That is what I want," said Wallace, "a drink of good water; and I have no doubt that when Alice awakens she will relish the same. Is there any about here, Joe?"

"Yas, thar's a mighty fine spring down below here. If Paddy 'll go an' get some I'll show him ther way."

"Phwat'll I fotch it in?" asked Dennis, looking first at his hands and then at his hat, the latter resembling a sieve, from the number of holes in it.

Joe withdrew from an aperture in the side of the cave, heretofore unperceived by the others, four powder horns, which he handed to Dennis, after emptying them of their contents.

Upon receiving the necessary directions, the Irishman left the cave in his quest for water.

The moon was just appearing above the tree-tops, shedding its welcome rays over the earth, by the light of which he easily found the spring, about two hundred feet from the cave.

After filling the horns he knelt down and quaffed liberally of the sparkling water.

"Be me sowl," he muttered, "that's good! but a drap ov ther craythur wud go bether."

He arose, gathered up the horns and prepared to return.

But that was for the moment all that he was able to do, for his eyes rested upon an apparition so entirely unexpected that he was literally rooted to the spot.

He was surrounded by savages, whose number appeared to him to be legion.

Their features were distorted by a broad grin, as if delighted and amused at the Irishman's surprise.

They felt so certain of their victim—only one against so many of them—that they were apparently inclined to play with him awhile, as the cat plays with the mouse before dispatching him.

But Dennis possessed a quick brain, and the faculty for executing a plan as soon as it was formed.

Quickly recovering from his surprise, he made a sudden spring, uttered a loud shout and darted toward the cave.

This sudden action caused the Indians to be in turn surprised.

Only for a brief space of time, however, did they stand looking in astonishment at the retreating form.

Then, with a deafening whoop and the discharge of a volley of arrows, they started in pursuit.

The inmates of the cave heard the Irishman's shout and the savages' war-whoop, and made up their minds that their friend's doom was sealed.

But Dennis himself speedily dispelled this illusion by springing through the opening, greatly scared, and with several arrows protruding from various portions of his clothing.

"Och hone!" he groaned, "thim murtherin' divils bez here. But they didn't chate me ov me wather," he added, exultingly, holding the horns up to the gaze of his companions.

The Indians rushed to the spot where Dennis had disappeared, expecting that he had fallen beneath their fire.

To their surprise no trace of him could be seen.

They gazed about them, and at each other in amazement, then began a careful search for an explanation of the mystery.

One soon discovered the entrance to the cave, but before he could signal to his companions Tiger Joe's rifle sped the messenger of death which silenced his tongue forever.

But the flash and report of the rifle proved the traitor, and the savages rushed to the spot.

They could not succeed in effecting an entrance, however, as all who tried were immediately shot down, and the remainder, fearing to face this unseen foe, drew back to consider the situation.

The havoc had aroused Alice, and she cowered tremblingly in one corner.

"Oh, it is dreadful!" she moaned; "we scarce escape from one danger but we are obliged to face another."

"Try and keep up your courage," urged Wallace, consolingly.

"Rest assured that this danger will vanish as did the others."

"Ther divil's bez comin' through ther roof!" suddenly exclaimed Dennis.

Such proved to be the case.

A heavy thud over their heads, and a shower of dirt rattling down upon them, confirmed the Irishman's words.

The occupants of the cave now felt that their fate was decided.

The moment had arrived when they must choose one of two evils.

Either to remain where they were and be buried alive by the falling dirt, or leave the cave and submit to capture.

While considering this matter Dennis struck consternation to the hearts of his companions by exclaiming:

"Now yees be alther kapin' as still as mice. 'Twas mysel' as fotched ther spalpeens here, an' it'll be mysel' as'll fotch 'em away!"

"What do you mean?" asked Wallace.

"Bedad, can't ye see phwat it is I mane? Wasn't I the only one ther murtherin' thaves seen come in here, an' if they sees me lave won't they think the cage bez empty, and won't they foller ther bird?"

His meaning burst with terrible clearness upon each one.

"No, no," urged Alice, "we will all die together."

"Can't yees see," continued Dennis, pointing upward, "the imps bez nearly through? Let ther blunderin' paddy go afore it bez too late!"

Before an effort could be made to prevent it the Irishman darted through the entrance and rushed through the crowd of savages without.

"Gad!" said Tiger Joe, "I didn't think ther chap had so much spunk."

"The noble fellow has made a martyr of himself," replied Wallace.

"The poor fellow reasoned that as the Indians had seen only him they would not suspect our presence, and by running out he would draw them away and leave the field clear for us. But I fear that he has simply hastened his own destruction."

"Wall, if thar's enny chance, we'd better change our quarters, fer like as not them imps 'll be here agin."

Joe went to the entrance and made a careful survey.

He saw the reds in full chase after Dennis.

It was an unequal race, he well knew—unequal in that the Irishman was no match for his fleet-footed pursuers.

Reporting no apparent trace of any of the savages in the neighborhood of the cave, Joe stepped outside and was immediately followed by Wallace.

He turned to assist Alice, when each received a blow on the head which felled them to the ground.

The next instant Alice was seized by two savages.

She uttered a piercing scream, when one of her captors placed his hand over her mouth, saying:

"Pale face girl no make noise—Injun kill!"

"Oh, God!" moaned the poor girl, "when will my troubles end? Why not kill me—let me die with my friends?"

"Pale face chief waiting for pale face maiden," was the reply, and she was hurried away.

"May I be skinned if that warn't the toughest lick I've had in a dog's age!" exclaimed Tiger Joe a few moments later, as he recovered from the effects of the blow he had received and rose to his feet, carefully rubbing the back of his head.

"I don't b'leve I'm hurt much o' ennything," he finally decided, "but them cussed Injuns played me a mean trick. Hello! here's Wallace. Wonder how bad he's hurt?"

Stooping over the prostrate form of his companion, he closely examined him.

"He's warm an' his heart beats," he muttered. "Thet shows thet he bean't dead."

He then looked within the cave.

"Jist as I expected. Ther gal's gone, ther Irishman's gone, an' this chap an' me are as nigh gone as a pair o' deserted cubs. Wall, I'll carry him inter ther cave ennyhow."

He was about to raise Wallace from the ground, when he paused and stood in a listening attitude.

"Some un's comin', an' it bean't Injuns, nither."

Placing his fingers in his mouth, he blew a loud, shrill whistle, which was speedily answered.

"Long Jim, by all thet's lucky!" he exclaimed, repeating the signal.

A minute later that trapper and his party rode up to the spot.

"What's ther damage, Joe?" asked Jim.

Before the scout could reply both Mr. Justin and Harry were beside him, questioning in one breath:

"Joe, have you seen anything of my wife?"

"Joe, have you found Alice?"

"Wall, friends, ther gal war hear a little while ago."

"And now?"

"Now she are in ther hands o' ther pesky Ossawas agin. But help me take care o' this chap an' then I'll tell yer all about it."

Wallace was carried into the cave, and in a short time had so far recovered as to be able to move about.

"Who is that man?"

This question was asked by Mr. Justin, who pointed toward Wallace.

"I don't know," replied Joe, "only that I met him sev'ral days ago, an' his name are Wallace."

Mr. Justin turned away with a half-satisfied manner.

"He is very like," he murmured.

Tiger Joe then related all that had befallen him during the past few days.

When he detailed the several appearances of the strange female rider, Long Jim interrupted him with the remark:

"Yas, we seen her, an' she warn't no sweet sight, nither."

He then acquainted Joe with the fact of his party having seen her dash by their camp with Bear Face in tow, and of the finding of the Indian chief's mangled remains the next day.

Preparations were then made to secure a night's rest, all feeling the need of recuperating their energies for the work of the following day.

The horses were corraled, guards stationed, and the men settled themselves down for sleep.

CHAPTER X.

DENNIS RUNS THE GANTLET—DOOMED TO BURN AT THE STAKE—A TIMELY RESCUE.

DENNIS exerted all his energies, and ran with remarkable speed for one so heavy and clumsy as he, closely pursued by the yelling savages.

He had covered considerable distance, when his foot unfortunately caught in some underbrush, and he fell sprawling upon the ground.

In a second his pursuers were upon him.

"Well," he said, looking around at his grinning captors, "Dennis has fell in the hands av ther divils at last!"

"Ugh! pale-face good meat," said one, as he fondly surveyed the Irishman's massive frame.

"Mate, is it?" muttered Dennis. "Is it that I've come ter?"

He was bound, and led a short distance to a spot where a still larger number of the savages were encamped.

Soon after a fresh commotion arose by the arrival of the two Indians with Alice in their charge.

"Blazes!" ejaculated the Irishman; "I'm not alone afther all. Phwat a fool yees be, Dennis O'Harra, fer bringin' that purty craythur inter sich a nist av varmint!"

Alice was also bound and placed beside Dennis.

"I fear," sobbed she, "that there is no hope for us now."

"I'd dance a jig fer ther divils from now till doomsday," replied Dennis, "ef I only felt as shure av livin' as yees be."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Phwat does I mane? Why, yees bean't botherin' yer purty head wid ther fear thet thim spalpeens bez goin' ter kill yez?"

"I have no doubt of it, Dennis. They are merciless creatures."

"Bedad, thin, if thet's all thet troubles yees, ye moight as well cheer up. Yer frind Dennis'll be roasted afore mornin', but ther naygurs won't harm yees."

"What makes you think so?"

"'Cause ther naygurs hev too fond a likin' fer white gals. They kape 'em fer thar lodges."

"Then I pray God that they may kill me. Death is preferable to such a fate!"

"Well, Miss Alice, it seems I have the pleasure of meeting you again," came in a taunting, triumphant voice, interrupting their conversation.

Both were startled and glanced at the speaker.

"Ben Small!" exclaimed Alice, the tone of her voice expressing fear and aversion.

"Ben Small, at your service," said he. "Old Bear Face, it seems, fell in love with you himself and put me out of the village. But he's done for now, and I am here to see that things are made pleasant for you while you dwell among us."

"Is it possible that you are in league with these savages?"

"No, they're in league with me. I have kept track of you since you left the village, and my friends here helped me to bring you where you could enjoy yourself better than you could with Tiger Joe."

"These savages are kings beside you, Ben Small, and I will appeal to them for protection against your persecutions."

"To-morrow you will witness these 'kings' make mince-meat of your Irish friend here, and after that I'll give you a chance to appeal," and with a mocking laugh the villain walked away.

Their thongs were soon after removed, and the two captives, surrounded by a cordon of savages reclining on the ground, slept where they lay.

The next morning another journey was made, and near noon they arrived at a small village of wigwams roughly formed of brush-wood.

Here the two captives were separated, a hut being made comfortable for the use of Alice and two squaws placed over her as guards, accompanied by whom, she was assured by Ben Small, she could roam about the village at her own pleasure.

"You needn't think of getting away from me again," he said. "I've got you now where Tiger Joe can't get at you, and here you'll have to stay. As long as you keep quiet you'll be used well, but the minute you become troublesome it'll be the worse for you."

Alice made no reply.

Through all these recent stirring incidents her mind had been busily revolving conclusions, and was now in such a state of calmness that she felt self-reliant and fearless.

She reasoned that so long as she remained unmolested there was hope of her friends finding and rescuing her.

Should the worst come, however, and Ben Small force his attentions upon her, she would free herself of his persecutions by means of the pistol in her possession.

The savages had not once thought of searching her, and the weapon Tiger Joe had given her rested securely in her bosom.

About the middle of the afternoon an uproar among the savages caused her to go to the entrance and look out.

The men and boys were ranged in two lines, facing each other, leaving a narrow passage-way between the two rows of Indians, each of whom held a club or stick in his hand and shouted gleefully over the sport in prospect.

At the further end stood Ben Small and Dennis, the latter eying the long lines of grinning savages with a terror-stricken visage.

Alice's heart bled for the poor fellow as she realized that he was about to be forced to undergo that trying ordeal—running the gantlet.

"Now, then, Paddy," she heard Ben say, "let's see how you are on the run."

"Bedad, but I'm good on me pins," said Dennis, turning his face in the opposite direction and starting off.

But the renegade's voice fell tauntingly upon his ear as he grasped the Irishman by the shoulder and said:

"Not that way, my buck; that's the road for you to take," pointing at the narrow passage with its living walls.

"Make thim naygurs lay down their shillaleys, thin."

"Oh, no; if you run fast enough they can't hit you."

"An' if I don't?"

"Then it's all day with you. But go on."

"Go on it is, thin. Begorra! if I don't make it hot fer ther spalpeens, thin me name's not Dennis!"

With a sudden, panther-like spring he bounded toward the nearest savage, yelling:

"Give me that shillaley!"

The movement was so entirely unlooked for that the Indian was taken by surprise, and his companions were stupefied.

With the club in his hand Dennis ran through the narrow lane, brandishing the weapon to the right and left, the crowd scattering with swelled heads, tingling shoulders, and yells of pain.

In spite of their hard usage this ruse of their captive touch a humorous vein in the breasts of the savages, and they greeted his exploit with roars of laughter.

But they had no desire to repeat the "sport."

The tables had been nicely turned upon them, and they were well satisfied with the taste of their own medicine most of them had received.

In the early evening Alice stood conversing with Dennis, who sat upon the ground with his hands bound, when they were interrupted by the approach of Ben Small and two Indians.

The latter raised Dennis to his feet.

"Phare bez yees manners?" he asked; "don't yees see that we doesn't want yer company?"

"Ossawa's waiting. Pale face dog wanted."

"Dog, bez I? If me hands were loose ye'd find I wud scratch more like a cat. Phwat does yees want ov me?"

"Pale face burn. All ready—see?" and the Indian pointed toward his companions.

Dennis and Alice glanced in the direction indicated, and discovered the savages piling brushwood around the trunk of a tree.

This action was terribly significant.

"Oh, Dennis!" sobbed Alice, "it is horrible!"

"Howly mither! but I'm thinkin' I'll be afther findin' it so mesel'!"

At this point the two Indians bore the Irishman away.

Alice turned toward Ben Small, her eyes flashing indignantly.

"Do you call yourself a man, and yet stand quietly by and see that poor fellow sacrificed?" she asked.

"That is one of the sports the reds indulge in," he answered carelessly. "I have no power to stop that, even if I would."

"And you wouldn't if you could?" she suggested, scornfully.

"No; it cements my influence with them to help the reds to enjoy little pastimes like that once in awhile."

"You are a brute and a coward!" she cried, her voice inflected with the contempt and loathing she entertained for him.

He answered her with a mocking laugh and walked away.

An unusual yell, uttered by the Indians, caused Alice to look toward them.

She saw Dennis bound to the tree with a pile of blazing brush about him.

By some oversight they had neglected to bind his legs, and no sooner had they applied the torch than he kicked the brush away, and used his feet so valiantly that his tormentors found it difficult to secure them.

This was finally accomplished, however, the brush was replaced, and the Indians again danced before their victim.

"Faith," muttered Dennis, "it's a quare, uncomfortable falin' I have jist now."

Then, as if with one accord, the savages cast their torches upon the pile of dry brush, and a dense volume of smoke enveloped the now thoroughly terrified Irishman.

"Ochone!" he shouted. "I'm in purgatory, shure!"

Mingling with his cries of pain rose the torture song of the Indians.

The scene was a most revolting one, and Alice turned away and buried her face in her hands.

CHAPTER XI.

A JOYOUS RECOGNITION—THE TRAPPERS TO THE RESCUE.

THE morning following the capture of Dennis and Alice the party of trappers, who had passed the night in the cave, made preparations for an early start in pursuit.

Wallace had fully recovered from the blow he had received, and was equally anxious with the rest to be on the trail of the savages.

A great distance was traveled during the day, without incident of any moment, and early in the evening they again went into camp, our friends being wearied and dispirited.

"How cum yer in these here parts, young feller?"

This question was put to Wallace by Long Jim, as the party were grouped together engaged in a social chat after partaking of the evening meal.

"I came here on a wild goose chase, I fear," replied Wallace. "I am in search of a friend whom I was separated from several years ago, and whom I have reason to believe came to this section with a party of trappers."

"Seems ter me," said Jim, "yer job'll be suthin' like huntin' for a needle in a haystack."

"I fear so," sighed Wallace, "still I have vowed not to return to my home until I can take him with me, if he is alive, or the news that he is dead."

"Wall, let's hear how it war."

"Ten years ago, when I was a boy of fifteen, I ran away from my home in an Eastern city. I had one of the best of homes, a kind and indulgent father, and one of the best mothers that ever lived.

"From early boyhood I was of a restless disposition, and delighted in reading stirring tales of adventures, each new one kindling within me a longing for a practical experience of the scenes of which I read—for I had lived them twice over in imagination.

"My principal associate was a boy of about my own age whose nature was the exact mirror of my own. We finally planned a romantic escapade similar to those which our favorite romancers depicted, following the usual routine that our mythical heroes were described as having pursued—packed a few clothes in a handkerchief and at midnight thoughtlessly deserted the paternal roof.

"Time after time since then, while thinking of the dear ones at home, have I cursed the folly of that step, and wished myself back in the dear old home."

"But what cum o' yer chum?"

"That I can't tell. All I know is that we separated a few days after leaving home. My mind was bent on seeking glory on the sea, while his ambition was to roam the prairies as an Indian slayer.

"Circumstances favored us both in our desires. I obtained a chance to ship as cabin-boy on an out-going vessel, while my companion at the same time fell in with a party of men on their way West, with whom he joined his fortunes.

"But the sea was not what I had pictured it, and a few years ago, landing in San Francisco, I left the ship in company with Dennis, who was steward and very much attached to me, and worked my way into the interior of the State.

"Good luck attended me from the start. I struck a rich claim and realized largely. Something over fifteen months ago I sold my claim, safely invested the proceeds, together with the products of my toil, and prepared to return home.

"Before doing this, however, I decided to make a trip through this section of the country, vowing to find my friend, if such a thing were possible. Although I know how it would fill the hearts of my parents with joy to see me return, yet I could not go back with an easy mind unless I could take him, or some word of him, with me."

During this recital both Mr. Justin and Mr. Vernon were visibly affected.

"I can sympathize with your parents," said the former, "for I am equally afflicted. It is a strange coincidence, too, that my son disappeared about the time you mention, and I judge from the same im-

pulse, as after he had gone I found a number of books in his room of the nature you describe. In fact, Mr. Vernon and I came to this wild country for the express purpose of looking for our lost boys."

At the mention of Mr. Vernon's name Wallace sprang to his feet and gazed intently at the speaker through the deepening gloom.

"Vernon!" he exclaimed; "that was the name of my chum. What is your name?"

Mr. Justin in turn rose to his feet and excitedly approached Wallace.

"My name is Justin. Are you—"

"Father!" exclaimed the young man, throwing his arms about the other's neck.

"My son! is it possible that I failed to recognize you? But how is it that you call yourself Wallace?"

"That was the name I assumed when I shipped, and I have been known by no other since, except when I invested my wealth, I did so in my proper name of Walter Justin."

"This is indeed great joy," said Mr. Justin, caressing his new-found son. "Let us right here thank God for his goodness in bringing us together in so remarkable a manner."

"Hold on, old man! we might as well make one job o' it."

The speaker was Tiger Joe, who stepped forward from the shadow, himself excited to an unusual degree.

"I would hev spoke afore, but I made a vow, too, jest like Walter did—"

He was prevented from making further speech by Mr. Vernon, who sprang forward, placed a hand on each of the scout's shoulders and closely scanned his features, then said, in a husky voice:

"Tell me—tell me, are you not my son?"

Joe's only answer was to throw his arms about the other's neck.

"Justin," said Mr. Vernon, finally, "God has singularly blessed us alike."

Words cannot describe the joy of that reunion of parents and sons, and of the long separated friends, although Wallace, as we shall continue to call him, was troubled over the uncertain fate of his mother and the captivity of his sister Alice.

The rejoicings of our friends and the congratulations of the trappers were interrupted by the hasty appearance of one of the party, who exclaimed:

"Jim, I think thar's work for us over thar."

"What do you mean?"

"Thar's a big camp fire not more'n half a mile over thar, an' ther reds ar' screechin' like wild cats."

"On yer bosses, boys!" commanded Jim. "Like as not we're needed thar."

"What do you imagine the trouble is?" asked Mr. Justin.

"I shouldn't be 'sprised ef thet's ther gang as giv yer boy an' Tiger Joe ther clip last night, an' ef it be—"

"What then?"

"Why, from ther noise ther critters ar' makin', I'll wager my boss that Irish chap ar' in a hot box."

"But—"

"We hain't got no time fer talk," interrupted Jim; "let's git thar."

Saying this, he rode swiftly away, followed by the remainder of the party.

CHAPTER XII.

DENNIS ESCAPES CREMATION—THE MYSTERIOUS RIDER IS IDENTIFIED.

ALICE's frame quivered with horror and dread as she listened to the shrieks of Dennis, who was enveloped in smoke arising from the brushwood which the Indians had just ignited.

But speedily her ears were greeted with a new sound that caused her to uncover her face and utter a glad cry.

It was the tramp of horses' feet.

Then, ringing out on the air, clearly distinct above the din made by the savages, in a voice which she easily recognized as Tiger Joe's, came the words:

"Come on, boys! Scatter, an' give it ter 'em!"

A volley of bullets came crashing in among the surprised Indians, and the next instant the trappers, with clubbed rifles, were in their midst dealing telling blows right and left and sweeping the redskins before them.

The burning brush about Dennis was quickly scattered and his thongs cut.

Outside of a blackened visage from the smoke, and scorched legs from the flames, the Irishman was uninjured, and he was overjoyed upon finding himself released.

"The Saints he praised!" he fervently ejaculated; "the devil bez chated ov Dinnis O'Harra fer this once!"

All this happened in a few seconds' time, and Alice stood watching in a dazed manner the exciting incidents.

As she stood thus she was startled upon being roughly seized by the arm.

"They've tracked the Irishman, but they won't get you!" came in hoarse tones from Ben Small's lips.

Placing one arm about her waist, he lifted her from her feet and hastily bore her away.

Alice quickly recovered from the shock caused by his sudden appearance, and uttered a loud scream.

With a muttered imprecation Small placed his hand over her mouth.

But her cry had been heard, and her friends rushed in pursuit, Harry outstripping all.

Another rescuer, however, appeared on the scene.

Approaching so swiftly and suddenly that none could tell from whence she came, rode the mysterious woman straight toward the fleeing renegade, reaching him just as he entered a stretch of woods.

With a bound she sprang from her still flying steed, and grasped Small, who dropped Alice and turned to defend himself against this strange foe.

Seemingly possessed of the strength of a giant, the creature raised him as she would a child and bore him into the forest, shouting:

"I've searched for you, ye traitor, and now you'll get your dues."

The next moment she was out of sight, her maniacal laugh ringing in the ears of our friends.

Harry hastened to the spot and raised Alice from the ground.

"Thank God you are safe, darling!" he exclaimed.

"Harry!" she cried. "Oh, I'm so glad! But where is father?"

"Here, daughter," and she was clasped in Mr. Justin's fond embrace.

"Is Dennis saved?" she asked.

"Troth, an' I'm all whole," said the Irishman, stepping forward.

"Bad cess ter ther varmint, they bez chated ov ther mate this time, Miss Alice."

"I am so glad to see you safe, Dennis! I was afraid our friends had arrived too late to save you."

"Shure, an' whin I heerd thim yell I thought mysil' in purgatory. But some ov thim spalpeens 'll git thar afore Dinnis O'Harra, I'm thinkin'."

"It beats my time whar thet critter cum from," said Long Jim.

"I've bin in these here parts nigh onto fifteen year, an' I never seed anythin' like thet afore."

The party then proceeded toward the place where the trappers were encamped earlier in the evening to seek rest for the night.

The mysterious woman, who appeared endowed with superhuman exertion, dragged the craven Ben Small for a great distance until a small clearing was reached.

Here she stopped, and tearing the tattered skirt from her body, bound her helpless victim to a tree.

Bruised and bleeding, weak from fright and the terrible usage he had received in being dragged over the thickly-wooded ground, Ben found it impossible to resist the movements of the unknown Nemesis into whose clutches he had fallen.

Continually communing with herself, she proceeded to gather brushwood and pile it about her victim, until he was nearly hid from sight.

He realized his peril, yet had not sufficient strength left to relieve himself.

Under ordinary circumstances he could easily have burst the slender thongs that bound him, but his powers had deserted him and he felt himself as weak as a child.

Having arranged the pyre to her satisfaction, the weird avenger ignited the brushwood with her torch and shouted:

"Now burn, ye base betrayer of innocent women!"

Upward surged the devouring flame, and as the renegade felt their relentless tongue singeing his flesh he uttered a shrill cry of agony, which rang sharply on the still night air.

"My God, boys, look thar!"

Thus exclaimed Long Jim, as he reined in his horse and pointed through the opening in the trees at the scene above described.

"Thet witch ar' burnin' Ben Small, by jingo!" cried Tiger Joe.

"Be St. Pathrick!" said Dennis, "but it's mesel' as hed a taste ov thet! Murther, but it's meltin'!"

"Let ther beast burn," said Jim; "it's too good a fate fer him, ennyhow."

"He's a viper, I know," said Tiger Joe, "but I'll be durned if I kin stand by an' see a man die like a dog!"

Saying this, he turned his horse's head and dashed toward the doomed man, followed by several of his companions.

The strange being seemed unconscious of any other presence, and as Tiger Joe and some others drew Ben Small from his perilous position Long Jim approached and seized her by the arm.

She offered no resistance, but followed meekly as he led her toward the group that had remained behind.

All gathered about to get a glimpse of the remarkable creature.

"Mother!"

This exclamation was uttered by Alice, who clasped her arms about the woman's neck.

"Ellen! my wife! Is it possible?" cried Mr. Justin.

The woman glanced from one to the other.

For an instant the light of reason shone in her eyes, then disappeared.

Alice wept bitterly, and Mr. Justin sobbed.

Even the hardy trappers shed tears of sympathy.

"Mother, dear mother, don't you know me?" sobbed Alice.

A tremor passed through the woman's frame, and she seemed agitated by an inward struggle between reason and insanity.

The brushwood she had fired still burned brightly, and by its glare every face was plainly discernible.

Wallace stepped forward and gently drew Alice aside.

Then, gazing intently into the woman's face, he threw off his cap, brushed back his hair from his forehead, and said:

"Mother! your lost Walter has come back to you; don't you know him?"

At the first sound of his voice she raised her eyes to his face, stepped a pace toward him, then threw her arms about his neck.

"My son, my son! I knew you would return to me!"

By the weight upon him Wallace knew that she had swooned, and he laid her gently upon the ground.

"Thank God!" said Mr. Justin; "when she recovers I believe she will be in the possession of her natural reason. Let us get away from this spot."

It was ascertained that the injuries received by Ben Small had proven too severe for him to overcome, and his bruised and scorched body lay where Tiger Joe had placed it.

There all that remained of the renegade was left, and the party tenderly raised the still unconscious Nemesis and proceeded toward their camping ground.

"It is clear to me," said Mr. Justin, "that the excitement of that night was too much for her. She must have been out of her mind when she rushed from the stockade, and, knowing that Ben Small had betrayed us, her mania was to find and wreak vengeance upon him."

"But it is a mystery," said Wallace, "where she got and how she managed that horse."

"Yes, and one of those mysteries which will never be explained."

We have no more to relate, except that in due course of time our friends reached the settlement without meeting with further adventure of any note.

Mrs. Justin did not recover her reason fully for several days, but she did so finally, much to the joy of her husband and children.

The joy of the reunion between Mrs. Vernon and her long-lost son, Tiger Joe, was greater than words can describe, and each member of the reunited families felt that their cup of bliss was full and running over.

Several weeks were required for Mrs. Justin to recover sufficiently to permit of her attempting to travel, and then the two families, with the new-found sons and Dennis, took their leave of the trappers and returned to the East.

Mrs. Justin was kept in ignorance of her identity with the mystery of the forest until long years after, when she heard her son-in-law, Harry, relate the story to his six-year-old son, and point to his grandmother as the weird rider who terrified the Ossawas and wreaked such terrible vengeance upon their chief, Bear Face, and the renegade Ben Small.

[THE END.]

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